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The Trickster as Selfish-Buffoon and Culture Hero

MICHAEL P. CARROLL

More has probably been written about "tricksters" than about any other single category of character that appears in the myths and folktales of the world. In fact, tricksters are so ubiquitous that Jung (1970) has been led to conclude that they reflect an archetype buried in the mind of all human beings. Unfortunately, at least part of the ubiquity of the trickster results from the fact that modern scholars tend to use an extremely broad definition of the term trickster itself, in that they tend to apply this term to any character who makes extensive use of deceit. Although such a broad definition does lead to the conclusion that tricksters are ubiquitous, it does so at the

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expense of blurring together at least two character-types that are actually quite distinct.

On the one hand, the term trickster is often used to describe what Klapp (1954) called the "clever hero." The clever hero is a character who consistently outwits stronger opponents, where "stronger" can refer to physical strength or power or both. In Klapp's analysis, characters like Davy Crockett, Robin Hood, Ulysses—even Will Rogers—are all considered to be clever heroes. It is presumably this "clever hero" sense of the term that allows the trickster label to be applied to Afro-American folk heroes like Brer Rabbit (Edwards 1978), to the Chinese folk hero Wen-chang (Levy 1974), to the Thai folk hero Sug (Brun 1976) and even to Black pimps in contemporary Los Angeles (Milner 1972).

On the other hand, the term trickster was *first* introduced in connection with the study of North American Indian mythology, and the North American trickster is not at all a clever hero. On the contrary, the Indian trickster is first and foremost a "selfish-buffoon"—"selfish" because so much of the trickster's activity is oriented toward the gratification of his enormous appetites for food and sex, and "buffoon" because the elaborate deceits that the trickster devises in order to satisfy these appetites so often backfire and leave the trickster looking incredibly foolish. But the one observation that *most* struck those early Amerindian scholars who studied the trickster myths (see, e.g., Boas 1898; Lowie 1909a; Radin 1972 [1956]) was that this selfish-buffoon was usually a culture hero as well. In other words, the Amerindian trickster is often the agent responsible for creating the conditions that allowed for the development of human civilization. Thus, for instance, the trickster might be the individual responsible for stealing fire and giving it to human beings, for instructing human beings in useful activities (like agriculture, boat-building, etc.), for clearing the land of obstacles and monsters, and so on. Quite apart from the fact that the Amerindian trickster is not particularly clever (since he seems to fail at least as often as he succeeds), it is his "culture hero" status that really sets him apart from the clever heroes of the world (who are generally *not* culture heroes).

Other investigators, of course, have noted that the term trickster is an especially broad one. Such investigators differ, however, in regard to what should be done about this. Babcock-Abrahams

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(1975), for instance, sifts through a variety of trickster definitions in an attempt to find the "best" (she ends up favoring Turner's view of the trickster as a liminal figure). Beidelman (1980), on the other hand, takes very much the opposite position, arguing that we should abandon any attempt to develop a cross-culturally valid definition of the trickster, and instead focus upon specific mythic figures in specific cultures. My own position falls somewhere in between. Very simply, I suggest that investigators should reduce the generality of the trickster label by recognizing that this label subsumes several distinct character types (e.g., the clever hero, the selfish-buffoon-who-is-a-culture-hero, etc.). Unlike Beidelman, however, I am convinced that each of these more specific trickster categories can prove useful in the analysis of myths from different cultures.

In any event, what I focus on in this article are tricksters of the selfish-buffoon/culture hero variety, and unless otherwise specified, the term trickster will henceforth refer only to this character type.

NORTH AMERICAN TRICKSTERS

There are literally dozens of tricksters who appear in the myths of the North American Indian tribes. Amerindian scholars, however, have tended to group these tricksters into seven distinct categories, on the grounds that all the tricksters within each category are simply different manifestations of the same mythic character, who has spread to different tribes through a process of cultural diffusion. In other words, it is conventional to talk of seven distinct tricksters in North American mythology.

Perhaps the most well-known of these seven tricksters is the one called "Coyote" by a variety of tribes west of the Mississippi. Apart from Coyote, other well-known tricksters include the character called "Nanabush" by several Algonkian speaking tribes of the Northeast, the character called "Raven" by several tribes in the Pacific Northwest, and the character called "Rabbit" by several of the southeastern tribes. Less well-known, perhaps, are the tricksters who appear in Siouan mythology. A number of investigators (see, e.g., Dorsey 1892; Radin 1972 [1956]:124–146) have made the point that most Siouan tribes tend to have *two* separate tricksters, *each* of

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whom acts the role of selfish-buffoon/culture hero. One of these two tricksters is invariably called "Hare" while the other is called "Iktomi" by the Dakota Sioux, "Wakdjunkaga" by the Winnebago, "Ishtinike" by the Ponca and the Omaha, and "Inktonmi" by the Assiniboine. The seventh and final Amerindian trickster, or more precisely, trickster category, includes the various tricksters who appear in the myths of the Algonkian speaking tribes of the western Plains, that is, the character called "Napi" by the Blackfoot,

TABLE 1

THE SEVEN BASIC TRICKSTERS, OR TRICKSTER CATEGORIES, WHICH APPEAR IN NORTH AMERICAN INDIAN MYTHOLOGY

Category Number:	*Usual Name(s) of the Trickster in this Category*	*Some Selected Tribes in Which This Trickster Acts the Role of Selfish Deceiver and Culture Hero:*	*Animal Associated With the Trickster In This Category:*
1	Coyote, Old Man Coyote	Various Apache tribes (Goddard 1918; Goodwin 1939; Opler 1938, 1940, 1942), Caddo (Dorsey 1905), Cochiti (Benedict 1931), Coeur d'Alene (Reichard 1947), Crow (Lowie 1918), Kalapuya (Jacobs 1945), Kutenai (Boas 1918), Mandan and Hidatsa (Beckwith 1938), Pawnee (Dorsey 1906), various Salishan and Sahaptin tribes (Boas 1917), Shoshone (Lowie 1909b; Steward 1943), Shuswap (Teit 1909), Taos (Parsons 1940)	coyote
2	Raven	Bella Bella (Boas 1932), Chilcotin (Farrand 1900), Haida (Swanton 1905), Tlingit (Swanton 1909), Tsimshian (Boas 1916)	raven
3	Nanabush, Nanibozhu, Wenebojo, Weskaychak, Manabush	Cree (Ahenakew 1929), Chippewa and Ojibwa (Chamberlain 1891; Reid 1964; Barnouw 1977), Menomini (Skinner and Satterlee 1915), Missasagas (Chamberlain 1890)	hare

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TABLE 1
(continued)

Category Number:	*Usual Name(s) of the Trickster in this Category*	*Some Selected Tribes in Which This Trickster Acts the Role of Selfish Deceiver and Culture Hero:*	*Animal Associated With the Trickster In This Category:*
4	Rabbit	Cree, Hitchiti, Alabama, Koasati, Natchez (Swanton 1929)	hare
5	Hare or Rabbit	Dakota Sioux, Winnebago, Ponca and Omaha, and Assinboine (for references, see the next entry)	hare
6	(a) Iktomi/ Inktomi (b) Wakdjunkaga (c) Istinike (d) Inktonmi/ Sitconski	(a) Dakota Sioux (Wissler 1907; Powers 1977) (b) Winnebago (Radin 1972 [1956]) (c) Ponca and Omaha (J. Dorsey 1890, 1892) (d) Assinboine (Lowie 1909c)	no associations with any animal, except in the case of Iktomi (spider)
7	(a) Nihanca (b) Napi/Napiw (c) Vihuk/Wihio (d) Nihaat/ Nihehat/ Nixant	(a) Arapaho (Dorsey and Kroeber 1903) (b) Blackfoot (McClean 1890; Wissler and Duval 1909) (c) Cheyenne (Kroeber 1900; Grinnell 1926) (d) Gros Ventre (Kroeber 1907; Curtis 1909; Cooper 1956)	spider, except in the case of Napi, where there appear to be no animal associations

"Nihanca" by the Arapaho, "Wihio" by the Cheyenne, and "Nihaat" by the Gros Ventres.

Table 1 presents a list of these seven trickster categories and gives (in column 2) some of the variant names associated with each. This table also gives (in column 3) some of the tribes in which these tricksters appear as both culture heroes and selfish-buffoons; the references in parentheses are to sources which contain a fairly substantial collection of trickster myths for the tribe being considered.

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All of the tricksters listed in Table 1 are portrayed as having a number of human qualities. On the other hand, it is nevertheless true that most of these tricksters are also associated with some particular category of animal. This association is typically established either by virtue of the name given to the trickster or by attributing to the trickster certain animal traits. It turns out that there are only four animal categories that end up being associated with our seven basic tricksters. These four are coyote, raven, hare, and spider. The particular animal category associated with each trickster is given in the final column of Table 1.

Presumably, the basis for arguing that Coyote is associated with the coyote, that Hare is associated with the hare, and that Raven is associated with the raven, is obvious. For the linguistic and textual evidence in support of the contention that both Nanabush and Rabbit are associated with the hare category, see Carroll (1981: 307–309) and Lévi-Strauss (1978). The basis for asserting that Iktomi, Nihansan, Wihio, and Nihaat are associated with the spider category lies in the fact that *iktomi* means spider in Dakota-Sioux (Radin 1972 [1956]:132), *nihansan* means spider in Cheyenne (Grinnell 1926:281), and *nihaat* means spider in Gros Ventre (Curtis 1909:171; Cooper 1956:2).

These seven basic tricksters, either singly or collectively, have been the subject of many investigations over the past century, and almost all investigators have felt compelled to address the very juxtaposition that makes these characters so distinctive: Why should a major culture hero simultaneously be portrayed as a selfish-buffoon? One of the first explanations offered for this unlikely juxtaposition of elements was offered by Brinton (1896:194), who advanced what might be called the "degradation hypothesis." Very simply, Brinton's argument is that the trickster started out as a "pure" culture hero, but that over time he became debased and acquired his selfish-buffoon elements. Brinton offered no evidence in support of this hypothesis, and it has generally fallen from favor with Amerindian scholars.

Boas (1898) offered an explanation of the trickster that is in some ways the reverse of Brinton's degradation argument. Boas argued that making a culture hero simultaneously a selfish-buffoon solves a conceptual difficulty likely to be experienced by the members of less advanced societies. It is Boas's contention that a sense of altruism is

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not likely to be very well developed in simpler societies, and so the members of such societies would find it difficult to understand why a culture hero would want to benefit mankind. The problem of motivation is solved, however, if the "benefits to mankind" are the accidental by-products of actions which the culture hero undertakes for purely selfish reasons. With the advance of civilization, a sense of altruism becomes more likely, and so altruistic behavior on the part of a culture hero becomes more understandable. The fact that the conceptual need to make a culture hero simultaneously a selfish-buffoon disappears with the "progress of society" (Boas's own phrase) explains why some culture heroes, like Glooscap among the Micmac and the Penobscot, are not selfish-buffoons (Boas 1898:10). Boas sees the Raven, the trickster among many northwestern tribes, as representing a transitional point in this entire process, since Raven often benefits humankind as a favor to some personal friend (i.e., Raven acts from motives that fall somewhere between "pure" altruism and "pure" selfishness).

There are at least two problems with Boas's analysis. First, it is far from obvious that a sense of altruism (which presumably refers to a willingness to put group interests ahead of self-interest) is inversely correlated with social complexity (what Boas called "the progress of society"). Second, Boas's argument leads to a very clear-cut prediction, namely that the probability of a tribe having a trickster who is both culture hero and selfish-buffoon should vary inversely with social complexity and no evidence is presented in support of this prediction. Even if we restrict ourselves to the few examples cited by Boas himself, it is not clear that his argument is supported. For instance, I can think of no reasonable measure that would allow us to say that the Penobscot and the Micmac (whose culture heroes are not selfish-buffoons) are clearly more advanced (or more altruistic) than the Haida and the Tsimshian (whose culture hero, Raven, is often a selfish-buffoon)—and yet this is exactly the way the data would have to turn out to support Boas's theory.

Ricketts (1966) has offered a more recent explanation of the trickster that is in some ways similar to Boas's. Like Boas, Ricketts argues that the trickster as culture hero and selfish-buffoon (what Ricketts calls the "trickster-fixer") is the more archaic pattern, that is, the one more likely to appear in "simpler" societies. For Ricketts, however, this is not due to the fact that such societies are somehow

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less altruistic, but rather to the fact that the trickster is the product of a "human being centered" religion:

> We see the trickster as man fighting alone against a universe of hostile, spiritual powers—and winning—by virtue of his cleverness. The trickster is man, according to an archaic institution, struggling by himself to become what he feels he must become—master of his universe. [Ricketts 1966:336]

Over the course of social evolution, Ricketts argues, as religious systems become more elaborate and begin to lose much of their human centeredness, trickster-fixers are more likely to be replaced by "pure" culture heroes who lack the physical appetites that make trickster-fixers so "human" and which lead them to behave so foolishly. In support of the contention that the trickster-fixer represents an "archaic" tradition, Ricketts (1966:328) points to the fact that "the more strongly the tribe has been influenced by the agricultural way of life, the less important is the place of the 'trickster-fixer' in the total mythology of the tribe." This is of course very similar to the inverse correlation between social complexity and the characterization of the trickster as both culture hero and selfish-buffoon at which Boas arrived.

Ricketts, unfortunately, provides no evidence whatsoever in support of his contention that there is an inverse correlation between the presence of a trickster-fixer and the "agricultural way of life." On the other hand, the latest version of Murdock's (1981) ethnographic atlas provides information relating to the practice of agriculture in 28 of the 47 tribes listed in Table 1, and this information allows us to construct at least a partial test of the Ricketts argument. According to the information provided by Murdock, only 9 of these 28 tribes practiced either intensive or extensive agriculture. In other words, if the tribes in Table 1 are indeed representative of the Indian tribes with trickster figures, then this data suggests that agricultural tribes were in a minority (9/28 = 32%) among such "trickster" tribes. Before relating this datum to the Ricketts argument, however, we must remember that agricultural tribes were *generally* in a minority in North America. In fact, out of the 124 North American tribes included in Murdock's overall sample, only 28, or 23% of the total, practiced either intensive or extensive agriculture. In other words, the proportion of "trickster" tribes which

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were agricultural (32% of the total) is not that much different from the proportion of *all* North American tribes which were agricultural (23% of the total). What this suggests is that there is *no* association between the presence of a trickster and the practice of agriculture, rather than the *inverse* correlation that Ricketts's (and Boas's) argument would lead us to expect.

Although other explanations of the Amerindian trickster have been offered over the years,[1] I would now like to consider—and expand upon—an explanation that I have already sketched in an earlier article (Carroll 1981).

A FREUDIAN DILEMMA

If we approach the Amerindian trickster with a psychoanalytic eye, then the appeal of the trickster seems obvious: the trickster seeks the immediate gratification of all those sexual desires (where "sexual" refers to any activity, including sexual intercourse, excretion, and eating, that produces a diffuse sense of physical pleasure) that all of us have, but which most of us learn to inhibit as we mature. In other words, just as Freud so often saw the occurrence of incest in dreams and myths as reflecting the incestuous desires that are generated in males and females by the Oedipal process (and which are later repressed), so we can see in the trickster's elaborate attempts to copulate with a variety of women or to gorge himself a reflection of our own inhibited desires for sex and for food.

This sort of argument seems perfectly able to account for the popularity of selfish-buffoons, and in fact Abrams and Sutton-Smith (1977) have used a version of this argument to account for the popularity of Bugs Bunny (whom they label a trickster) among young children. But as we noted in the previous section, the Amerindian trickster is far more than a selfish-buffoon, and I can see no obvious way in which this "tricksters-reflect-our-inhibited-desires" hypothesis can account for the two other observations that make the Amerindian tricksters so unique, namely, that they are generally culture heroes as well as buffoons, and that they are generally associated with one of four specific animal categories (raven, coyote, spider, and hare).

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A much more adequate explanation of the Amerindian trickster can be had by merging the psychoanalytic perspective with the structuralism of Claude Lévi-Strauss. It is a central tenet of Lévi-Strauss's approach to myth that one of the functions of myth is to provide a logical structure (by which Lévi-Strauss simply means a chain of psychological associations) which enables the human mind to evade the perception of some unpleasant dilemma. As Leach (1974:62-63) pointed out quite some time ago, myths often fulfill this function by expressing the dilemma openly, and yet by so confusing things that the perception of the dilemma becomes difficult if not impossible. If Lévi-Strauss and Leach are correct, then the first step in any attempt to explain the popularity of trickster myths would be to discover the dilemma to which these myths are addressed, and here again I think that the psychoanalytic perspective can be useful.

It is a recurrent theme in Freud's work, especially in *Totem and Taboo* (1918) and *Civilization and Its Discontents* (1975[1930]), that unless human beings inhibit their instinctual desire for sexual pleasure, orderly social life would be impossible. This conclusion flows from the observation that a group in which every member sought only the immediate gratification of his or her sexual instincts would not be able to develop the patterns of cooperation and hierarchy necessary for the maintenance of human society. All this, for instance, explains (for Freud) why the establishment of an exogamy rule is such a crucial transition in the social evolutionary history of human beings, since the establishment of this rule (which requires men to renounce sexual access to their mothers and sisters) is the first historical instance in which human beings place a social restriction on their sexual desires (Freud 1918).

Yet if Freud is correct, then all human beings are faced with the same dilemma, and it is this dilemma (I argue) which is addressed by the Amerindian trickster myths. Very simply, that dilemma is as follows:

1. All human beings desire BOTH the immediate gratification of their sexual impulses AND the development of civilization (in the sense of "culture"), yet
2. the Freudian reality is that both desires cannot be fulfilled

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simultaneously, since the immediate gratification of our sexual impulses would led to the destruction of culture.

If this dilemma does underlie the trickster myths, then it should be reflected in the psychological associations that these myths establish, and this is indeed the case.

The first part of the dilemma, namely, that all human beings desire both the immediate gratification of their sexual impulses and the smooth functioning of group life, is reflected in the very thing that makes the Amerindian trickster so distinctive, namely, that he is both a selfish-buffoon and a culture hero. In other words, by making the trickster a character who goes to great lengths to gratify enormous appetites for food and for sex and a character responsible for introducing those things that enable human society to develop, the myths are establishing a psychological association between the two things—the immediate gratification of sexual desires and "culture"—that all human beings would like to have associated.

On the other hand, the associations established by the trickster myths also reflect the "Freudian reality," that is, the fact that the uninhibited gratification of our sexual impulses would lead to the destruction of culture. To see how this is done, consider again the four animal categories associated with the Amerindian trickster: coyote, raven, hare, and spider. Is there any clearly observable characteristic which all these animals have in common? Yes: it turns out that all four types of animals are characterized by extremely *solitary* habits. Ravens are usually sighted singly or at most in pairs (in contrast, say, to crows which are physically similar to ravens but are very gregarious); coyotes forage independently and thus are likely to be observed singly (in contrast to wolves, which tend to hunt in packs); hares have long been noted for their solitariness (and in fact, early naturalists tended to distinguish hares and rabbits on the grounds that hares were solitary and rabbits gregarious).[2]

The association with solitary habits, however, is perhaps most evident in the case of spiders. Spiders generally associate with members of their own species on only two occasions: when they are born and when they mate. Apart from this, adult spiders typically spend their entire lives in isolation. There are a few species of spider who are

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group-living (who aggregate as adults other than to mate), but these are quite rare. One estimate (Burgess 1978:69) is that out of about 33,000 different species of spider, only about 30 are group-living.

Yet group living is the very essence of human society, and so by associating the trickster with solitary animals, the myths are in effect associating the "immediate gratification of sexual impulses" with the *absence* of "culture"—and are thereby establishing an association that reflects the second part of our dilemma, namely, that the immediate gratification of our sexual impulses would lead to the destruction of culture.

In summary then, North American trickster myths associate the "immediate gratification of sexual appetites" *both* with the creation of culture (since the trickster is so often a culture hero) *and* with the absence of culture (since the trickster is usually associated with an animal characterized by solitary habits). In so doing, these myths therefore provide a set of psychological associations (what a Lévi-Straussian would call a "logical structure") that reflects the Freudian dilemma discussed earlier. Of course, since this dilemma is presumably universal, we would expect to find the associations which reflect this dilemma being established not just by North American trickster myths, but also by trickster myths from other parts of the world.

SOUTH AMERICAN TRICKSTERS

In his comparative survey of South American cultures, Steward (1949:752) noted that the "trickster theme" seems most clearly developed in the mythology of the Indian tribes of the Chaco region, notably including the Toba and the Mataco, and these are the two tribes that I focus on here.[3] The Toba trickster is called "Fox" while among the Mataco he is called "Tawk'wax" (also spelled "Tawkxwax" and "Takjuaj"). Metraux (1946a:368) describes both Fox and Tawk'wax as being "greedy, lewd, boastful and easily fooled"—a characterization deriving from the fact that both tricksters, like their North American counterparts, are so often driven into buffoonery or embarrassment as a result of their insatiable appetites for copulation and food. Consider, for example,

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the following stories, which seem typical of the Chaco myths which portray these tricksters as selfish-buffoons:

The Trickster (Fox in the Toba version and Tawk'wax in the Mataco version) is left to care for a baby being nursed by an old woman. He eats the baby and runs away. The Old Woman (or her family) seek the Trickster out and plug up all his orifices with mud and the mud proves unbreakable. [Metraux 1946b:133]

Skunk attracts wild pigs by singing, and then becomes flatulent. The pigs are killed by the smell. The Trickster (Fox or Tawk'wax) tries to imitate skunk, but only succeeds in defecating, which does not kill any pigs. The Trickster leaves, very ashamed. [Metraux 1946b:140-141]

Fox suffers a minor injury and asks to be nursed by his sister-in-law. The sister-in-law initially agrees to be his nurse, but eventually learns that Fox only wants to have sexual intercourse with her. She rebuffs him, and tells what happened to others. The result is that Fox loses his wife. [Metraux 1946b:140-141]

Tawk'wax is very smitten with a woman, but she rejects him and marries Woodpecker instead. One day, while the woman is bathing, Tawk'wax sneaks up and tries to rape her. The woman flees, leaving her clothes behind. Fearing Woodpecker's return, Tawk'wax puts on the woman's clothes and poses as Woodpecker's wife. Woodpecker is suspicious, and sends an ant to inspect Tawk'wax's genitals. The ant bites Tawk'wax, the ruse is revealed, and Woodpecker kills Tawk'wax. [Lévi-Strauss 1973:108-109]

But again, like their North American counterparts, Fox and Tawk'wax are more than just selfish-buffoons: they are also culture heroes. For instance, both the Toba and the Mataco have myths in which it is the trickster (Fox or Tawk'wax) who is responsible for stealing fire and introducing it to human beings (Metraux 1939:31, 53-54; 1946b:107-109). Then too there are a number of Chaco myths (Metraux 1946b:127-128; Lévi-Strauss 1973:94) in which the trickster (Fox or Tawk'wax) rubs against a tree and is shredded by the tree's thorns. He then takes out various parts of his body (e.g. his heart, his intestines, his stomach, etc.), and these become a variety of plants which now supply food, providing human beings with sustenance. Finally, in the case of the Mataco, Tawk'wax is specifically identified as introducing human beings to (1) corn, and (2) the procedures used to cure disease (Metraux 1939:18-19, 24).

In other words, these Chaco trickster myths establish the same association between the "uninhibited gratification of sexual ap-

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petites" and the "origin of culture" that is established in North American trickster myths. The argument presented in the previous section would therefore lead us to expect that these same myths would simultaneously establish an association between "the uninhibited gratification of sexual appetites" and the "absence of culture," and that the easiest way to do this would be to associate the trickster with a solitary animal.

In the case of the Mataco trickster Tawk'wax this expectation is apparently not borne out. Tawk'wax is portrayed in Mataco mythology as a human being and, to my knowledge, no one has suggested an etymology for the name "Tawk'wax" that would allow us to associate this name with any animal category. In fact, the near perfect parallel between "Fox" stories and "Tawk'wax" stories led Metraux to try to get his Mataco informants to say that Tawk'wax was just like Fox, yet they consistently refused to do this and insisted instead that Tawk'wax was fully human (Metraux 1939:7). The fact that Tawk'wax is not associated with a solitary animal must, therefore, count as a negative case for my argument.

On the other hand, the fact that the Toba trickster is called "Fox" suits the argument perfectly, since foxes are extremely solitary animals. Most discussions of canine behavior, for instance, almost always contrast the solitary habits of coyotes and foxes with the more gregarious patterns typical of wolves (see, e.g., Fox 1971). If anything, foxes are the *most* solitary of all canines. Burrows (1968: 124) for example, reports that in all his years of observing foxes in the wild, he has never once observed two adults together.

At least in the case of the Toba trickster, then, it seems clear that once again we have a trickster being associated with a solitary animal.

AFRICAN TRICKSTERS

If we use the term trickster in its most general sense, that is, if trickster simply means "deceiver," then all sorts of tricksters appear in African mythology, and several investigators have already provided overviews of these African tricksters and the myths in which they

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appear (see, e.g., Street 1972; Paulme 1977; Pelton 1980). Yet a case-by-case consideration of the characters to whom the trickster label has been applied reveals that most of these (including, e.g., all the African tricksters called "Hare" and "Tortoise") are really only clever heroes who use deceit to achieve some advantage, and are *not* characters who are led into buffoonery by virtue of enormous sexual appetites and who act the role of culture hero. If we restrict our attention to those African tricksters who *are* led into buffoonery by their sexual appetites and who *are* simultaneously culture heroes, then our list of African tricksters reduces to only four well-documented cases. These four cases involve, respectively, the character called "Anansi" by the Ashanti, the character called "Ture" by the Azande, the character called "Legba" by the Fon, and the character called "Eshu" by the Yoruba.[4]

Perhaps the most well-known of these four is the Ashanti trickster called "Anansi" (also written as "Ananse"). Like his North and South American counterparts, Anansi often acts the role of the greedy and lecherous buffoon. Anansi's lechery, for instance, is evident in those Ashanti myths wherein Anansi marries a whole village of women (Rattray 1930:77), describes his penis as being longer than 77 long poles fastened together (Rattray 1930:107), and uses trickery in order to seduce another man's wife on nine different occasions during the course of a single night (Rattray 1930:133-137). Generally, however, Anansi's drives seems more gustatory than sexual. In several different myths, (see, e.g., Rattray 1930:63-67, 213-217; Barker and Sinclair 1972[1917]:64), Anansi learns of a magical procedure that allows him to obtain all the food he needs. Not content with this, Anansi's greed leads him to abuse the procedure in some way in order to obtain more food than he really needs, with the inevitable result that he ends up in some embarrassing position. Anansi's greed is so great that he will often withhold food, of which he has plenty, from starving blood relatives (Rattray 1930: 63-67, 249). Finally, there are some myths in which Anansi ends up embarrassing himself simply because he cannot control his hunger. Thus, for instance, in one story (Rattray 1930:119-123) Anansi wants to fast in honor of his just-deceased mother-in-law. His hunger overwhelms him, however, and so he steals some beans from a cooking pot. Not wanting the theft, or his inability to keep the

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fast, to be discovered, he hides the beans under his hat. The beans are extremely hot, and the end result is that his head is severely burned (which is why Anansi is subsequently bald).

Anansi's status as a culture hero derives from the fact that he is seen as the person who inadvertently brought wisdom into the world (Rattray 1930:5-6), who introduced the European hoe to humankind (Rattray 1930:43), who is responsible for the norm which prohibits husbands and wives from revealing marital confidentialities (Rattray 1930:129-132) and who is responsible for the fact that women participate in agricultural activities (Rattray 1930:141-145).

The strong resemblance between Ture, the Azande trickster, and the Amerindian tricksters discussed earlier has already been noted by Evans-Pritchard (1967:28-29), and Evans-Pritchard's summary description of Ture certainly leaves no doubt of Ture's selfishness:

> Ture is a monster of depravity: liar, cheat, lecher, murderer, vain, greedy, treacherous, ungrateful, a poltroon, a braggart . . . utterly selfish. . . . He has sexual congress with his mother-in-law and by implication with his sister also; and . . . these monstrously uninhibited acts are accepted without demur.

On the other hand, Ture is also a culture hero. Three separate myths (Evans-Pritchard 1967:37-40) relate how it was Ture who provided humankind with (1) the food we eat, (2) water, and (3) fire.

The next two African tricksters, the character called "Legba" by the Fon and the character called "Eshu" by the Yoruba are very similar, which is not particularly surprising given that the Fon probably modeled Legba upon Eshu (Herskovits 1967:223). In any event, both Legba and Eshu, like most of the tricksters we have been discussing, possess enormous sexual appetities. In the case of Legba, for instance, this is clearly established in a myth (Herskovits 1967:205) which relates how Legba was driven to have sexual intercourse both with his own sister and with his sister's daughter. When this behavior is uncovered by the high god Mawu, Legba's punishment is that his penis will be forever erect and that his sexual appetites will never be sated. In another myth (Herskovits 1967: 225-229), Legba's sexual appetites lead him to engage (on three separate occasions) in necrophilia, and later to have sexual inter-

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course with his mother-in-law. In the same myth, Legba obtains (through trickery) the right to have sexual intercourse with any woman he desires. In light of all this, it is hardly surprising to learn that statuettes of Legba often portray him with "a fantastically large and erect penis" (Herskovits 1967:224).

In the case of Eshu, it is harder to point to specific myths which justify associating him with "insatiable sexual appetites" but the association is there nonetheless. The Yoruba, for instance, hold Eshu responsible for acts of adultery and for illicit sexual relations generally, and the long pig-tails which are typical of the hairstyle associated with Eshu are often carved in the shape of a penis on statuettes of Eshu (Wescott 1962:343, 350).

On the other hand, though possessing enormous sexual appetites, both Eshu and Legba exhibit the now familiar pattern: they are also culture heroes. Their status as culture heroes, however, rests upon a single association, namely, the association between Eshu and Legba and the system of divination practiced, respectively, by the Yoruba and the Fon, and so a brief discussion of this system of divination is necessary.

Both the Yoruba and the Fon believe that the destiny of each individual human being has been preordained by a high god, called "Olorun" by the Yoruba and "Mawu" by the Fon. It is possible, however, to use a system of divination, called *Ifa* by the Yoruba and *Fa* by the Fon, in order to learn your destiny. The prevailing ideology which underlies the system of *Ifa/Fa* divination is that human society will function more smoothly if human actions are "in accord" with the forces of destiny. Thus, for instance, by using *Ifa/Fa,* a person can learn which actions will maximize the happiness, and minimize the unhappiness, that has been pre-ordained for him or her.

That the failure to practice divination would lead to social conflicts and the destruction of human society is made evident in a number of different myths. For instance, a Fon myth (Herskovits 1967:204–205) relates how, in the period *before* human beings received *Fa,* the three kingdoms of the world (Sky, Water, and Earth, respectively) were engaged in a war that threatened to destroy

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humankind. The reason given for this state of affairs is very simply that humans "did not understand the language of their parent (i.e., Mawu) and, therefore, could only blunder." The myth then goes on to relate how *Fa* was sent to earth in order to correct this situation. The same general theme is expressed in a Yoruba myth which tells of a time when danger and chaos threatened human affairs and when *Ifa* was used to determine the proper sacrifice to the proper deity that would correct this situation. Once the sacrifice was made and accepted, tranquility was restored to human society:

. . . Semen became child,
Men on sick bed got up,
All the world became pleasant.
It became powerful.
Fresh crops were brought from farm
Yam developed.
Maize matured
Rain was falling
All the rivers were flooded.
Everybody was happy. [Pemberton 1977:25]

The implication, of course, is that if *Ifa* had not been used to determine the appropriate sacrifice, all these things would not have occurred.

Generally, then, the use of *Ifa/Fa* divination is seen as a necessary precondition for the smooth functioning of human society, and all commentators agree in saying that *Ifa/Fa* divination is intimately associated with Eshu/Legba. This association is established in two ways. First, both the Yoruba and the Fon have myths in which Eshu/Legba is the agent responsible for bringing *Ifa/Fa* to human beings (Herskovits 1967:204-205; Bascom 1969:107). But the association is also established by the fact that Eshu/Legba is seen to be the *only* intermediary between human beings and the gods. Thus, it is Eshu/Legba who transmits the thoughts of Olorun/Mawu (i.e., "destiny") to human beings in the course of *Ifa/Fa,* and it is Eshu/Legba who transmits the sacrifices dictated by *Ifa/Fa* to the various gods. This is why, for instance, most of the sacrifices dictated by *Ifa/Fa* are made at shrines dedicated to Eshu/Legba, and why most of the artifacts used in the course of *Ifa/Fa* are decorated with representations of Eshu/Legba.

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In summary, then, the association of Eshu/Legba with "culture" and "civilization" is insured by the strong association between Eshu/Legba and the one thing, *Ifa/Fa,* that is seen as the necessary precondition for the smooth functioning of human society.

It should now be clear that these four tricksters—Anansi, Ture, Eshu, and Legba—conform to the pattern typical of North American tricksters like Coyote, Raven, Hare, etc. In each case, we have a deceiver who is simultaneously a culture hero *and* a person characterized by an insatiable appetite for food or sex or both. The Freudian argument developed earlier would now lead us to expect that these African tricksters will also be associated with the "absence of culture." Does this association exist?

In the case of the North and South American tricksters we have considered, this association with the "absence of culture" was established by associating these tricksters with those animals—coyotes, ravens, hares, spiders, and foxes—characterized by solitary habits. It therefore comes as no surprise to learn that "Anansi" means "spider," and that in fact the labels "Anansi" and "Spider" are used interchangeably in the Anansi myths cited earlier. Since "Ture" also means "spider" (Evans-Pritchard 1967:23), and since it has already been pointed out (in connection with the discussion of the Plains Indian tricksters who are also associated with the "spider" category) that spiders are extremely solitary, it seems clear that at least in the case of Anansi and Ture, the Freudian argument is once again validated.

On the other hand, neither Eshu nor Legba seem to be associated with any sort of animal, solitary or not. We must keep in mind, however, that both Eshu and Legba differ from all the other tricksters we have considered, in that both of these tricksters are the focus of a cult and both have shrines erected in their honor. Furthermore, all observers have noted a pattern in connection with Eshu/Legba shrines that seems directly relevant to the present discussion: shrines dedicated to Eshu/Legba are invariably placed *outside* the physical boundaries of the groups associated with that shrine, while this placement is not generally observed in connection with the shrines dedicated to other deities (Wescott 1962:41; Argyle 1966: 188; Herskovits 1967:298-300; Bascom 1969:60; Courlander 1973:

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31, 182). Thus, for instance, the Eshu/Legba shrine associated with the village is placed just *outside* the boundaries of the village, and the Eshu/Legba shrine associated with a particular household is placed just *outside* the doorway of that household.

In the case of the Fon, Herskovits (1967:229) explains the tendency to place Legba shrines outside the village or the household by arguing that such a placement reflects Legba's role as the guardian of human beings. Yet, even accepting the proposition that the Fon do view Legba as a guardian, this still does not really explain the placement of his shrines *outside* village/household boundaries. After all, by Herskovits's (1967:300) own testimony, the shrine dedicated to the deity (other than Legba) who is specifically charged with guarding a particular household is usually placed *inside* that household.

I want to suggest that the invariable placement of Eshu/Legba shrines outside the boundaries of the household or the village is simply a way of disassociating Eshu/Legba from human society, that is, from "culture." In other words, the invariable placement of Eshu/Legba shrines *outside* the boundaries of important social groups (like the household or the village) establishes the same disassociation with "culture" that is established in the case of other tricksters by associating these other tricksters with solitary animals.

SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

This completes our review of trickster figures from North America, South America, and Africa. On the face of it, it comes as no surprise to find that the trickster is a mythic character with a widespread distribution; this has been noted many times before. My original point however was that the seeming ubiquity of the trickster is in large measure a methodological artifact that results from the use of an overly-general definition, that is, from the tendency to apply the trickster label to any character that makes extensive use of deception. It strikes me that little is to be gained (if our goal is to understand the appeal of myth and folklore) by lumping together clever heroes of the Davy Crockett and Brer Rabbit variety with

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culture heroes of the Nanabush and Legba variety under a common trickster designation.

On the other hand, even if we adopt a relatively specific and restricted definition of the term trickster, that is, even if we apply the trickster label *only* to those deceivers who are simultaneously selfish-buffoons and culture heroes, then we still find that tricksters (of this sort) are widespread.

The argument put forth here has been that the key to understanding why a deceiver who is simultaneously a selfish-buffoon and a culture hero is found in the myths of so many different cultures lies in the observation that such deceivers are usually (though not always) associated with "solitary habits." Such mythic characters therefore embody a set of associations that reflect a universal human dilemma. That dilemma, very simply, is that all human beings would like to indulge their sexual appetites *and* have the benefits of "culture," and yet realize that such indulgence would lead to the destruction of culture.

Problems, of course, remain. My analysis, for instance, shares a defect in common with most Freudian analyses of myth, namely, that in attempting to explain the content of a set of myths by reference to psychic *universals,* it becomes difficult to account for cultural *variation.* In the case at hand, for example, I cannot easily account for the vast majority of cultures whose mythology does *not* involve a trickster who is both selfish-buffoon and culture hero. On the other hand, the problem of cultural variation is not insurmountable.

For instance, in making my argument, I have assumed that people everywhere will value "culture" (in the sense of "orderly human society"). Yet Edwards (1978) has made the point that for the disadvantaged groups in a society, who are regularly and systematically denied access to the benefits of "culture," the value of maintaining order in society is by no means certain. On the contrary, Edwards argues, within such disadvantaged groups, "short-term gratification" might be the most adaptive strategy, even though such a strategy—if adopted by everyone in the society—would undermine the cohesion of the society as a whole. Edwards uses this argument to explain the popularity of what he calls "Afro-American tricksters"—

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what we would call "Afro-American clever heroes"—among New World Blacks, since these tricksters-who-are-clever-heroes typically *do* act to achieve short-term gratification at the expense of group cohesion.

If Edwards is correct, of course, and disadvantaged groups, like New World Blacks, *are* less likely to value "culture" (in the sense of "orderly human society"), then they should be less troubled by the Freudian dilemma that we have been discussing (i.e., if "culture" is not particularly valued, then the fact that immediate gratification leads to the destruction of culture poses no problem). This in turn suggests that no purpose would be served by associating Afro-American tricksters with the "origin of culture" (since the whole point of this association is to express belief that immediate gratification and culture are simultaneously valued)—and in fact Afro-American tricksters are almost *never* culture heroes. This failure to make Afro-American tricksters act as culture heroes is especially striking in the case of those Afro-American tricksters who are clearly based upon African models who *are* culture heroes. Thus, for instance, there seems little doubt but that those Afro-American tricksters ("deceivers") called Anansi, Hanansi, Nancy, Nansi, etc. are derived from the Ashanti trickster called Anansi. Yet in reading New World "Anansi" stories,[5] it becomes clear that in crossing the Atlantic Anansi changed, and that in his New World reincarnation Anansi is *not* the culture hero that he was in Africa, that is, he is *not* associated with the introduction of those elements that ensure the smooth functioning of society.

This one example of course does not fully explain why some societies have tricksters of the selfish-buffoon/culture hero variety and others do not, but it does demonstrate that the problem of cultural variation can be addressed from within a Freudian framework. Nevertheless, before addressing the issue of cultural variation, it would probably be more useful to establish more precisely the range of that variation. For instance, although the trickster as a selfish-buffoon and culture hero appears widely in North America, I have been able to locate only two South American societies (the Toba and the Mataco) who have such tricksters, and all of my African examples come from West and Central Africa. I have no doubt but that specialists in South American and African mythology

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(to say nothing of those specializing in the mythology of Asia, Europe, and the Insular Pacific) could add a few more examples, and I hope that some of these scholars do just that. When they do, I am certain that in most cases they will find such tricksters associated with solitary animals, or at least solitary habits.

NOTES

[1] Lévi-Strauss (1963:224-226) has of course published a very well-known analysis of the North American trickster. It was precisely Lévi-Strauss's analysis that I addressed at great length in my earlier article (Carroll 1981). Without going into any great detail here, let me simply note that Lévi-Strauss's argument hinges upon an association between tricksters and the category "carrion-eating animal." While ravens and coyotes eat carrion to some degree, it hardly seems reasonable to call hares and spiders—the other two animal categories associated with North American tricksters—carrion-eaters.

[2] For the documentation establishing the solitary habits of coyotes, ravens, and hares, see Carroll (1981:307-308).

[3] Murphy (1958) has applied the "trickster" label to Daiiru, an armadillo who appears in Mundurucu mythology. A reading of the Mundurucu myths presented by Murphy does indicate that Daiiru often assists the main Mundurucu culture hero, Karusakaibo, and that he (Daiiru) does quite often use deceit to gain some end. On the other hand, there is no evidence in these myths that Daiiru is characterized by the enormous sexual appetites which characterize North American tricksters like Coyote, Raven, etc. Daiiru is more a "clever hero" than anything else, and his association with Karusakaibo makes Daiiru one of the few clever heroes who might also be a culture hero.

[4] Pelton's (1980) analysis puts the Dogon character called "Yuguru" into the same trickster category as Anansi, Eshu, and Legba. Dogon mythology (Griaule and Dieterlen 1954; Griaule 1965) does portray Yuguru as deceitful, and does hold Yuguru responsible for several aspects of the world as it is currently constituted (thus making it plausible to argue that Yuguru is a culture hero of sorts). Yet, my reading of these myths does not lead to the impression that Yuguru is characterized by enormous sexual appetites, and there are certainly no myths in which Yuguru's sexual appetites lead him into buffoonery.

[5] For some examples of New World Anansi stories, see Beckwith (1924), Courlander (1976), and Edwards (1978).

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